Lark Ellen, the Songbird of Southern California

By JOHN B. WALLACE

IF A gracious, queenly woman can be classed as such, Madame Ellen Beach Yaw, or "Lark Ellen," as she has been affectionately nicknamed by her thousands of admirers, is an institution in Southern California. No commemorative celebration, no charity fete is judged completely without an outpouring of liquid notes from that wonderful throat. And seldom does this gifted artist fail to respond. The people of Southern California have adopted her for their own and she has returned their love and admiration in kind.

Madame Yaw has the highest range of any voice known to the musical world. With no seeming effort she reaches two full tones above double high C. She can follow a flute through the upper register and it is almost impossible to distinguish the tone of the instrument from that of her voice. Yet there is nothing bizarre or freakish about her notes. In the middle register her tones are as rich and full as a mezzo soprano.

She can out-trill and out-range the birds, themselves, and it is from her remarkable imitation of the lark that she has earned the nickname of "Lark Ellen." The possibilities of her voice were never shown to better advantage than in her song "The Skylark," which is of her own composition.

Madame Yaw is a native of New York state. Singing seemed to be as instinctive with her as it is with the birds. At the age of four years she made her first public appearance in the village where she was born. At the age of six she sang in her first concert.

Those were the days of singing schools, when the singing master, long haired and armed with a tuning fork, visited each community and organized choruses among the young people.

It is to one of these obscure singing teachers to whom belongs the credit for first discovering the talent of the little village maid.

The resources of her family were limited and it strained them to the utmost to send the girl while she was yet in her early teens, to New York. She was fortunate in procuring for a teacher Madame Hervor Torpadi, who has started so many young singers on the road to fame and fortune. Madame Torpadi recognized that in her new pupil she had a voice of unusual quality. She urged her to go abroad for further instruction. Here again the lack of money made the way difficult. It was only after a bitter struggle that the young girl was able to raise the fare to Europe. She was armed with letters to some of the most noted singers and teachers on the continent, but she had to trust in Providence for financial assistance after she got there.

And, as is nearly always the case, Providence did come to her rescue in the person of Lady Valerie Susie Meux. Lady Meux was a wealthy and titled musical critic and art patron of London. She was immediately attracted by the voice and personality of the young American girl. So great was her affection that she wished to adopt the singer, but the girl could not bring herself to forswear her parents or her native land and was compelled to refuse. Not to be denied, however, Lady Meux made the young singer her protégée and assisted her in obtaining instruction from some of the most noted teachers in Europe, including the famous Madame Marchesi, of Paris. For ten years she studied and sang leading rôles in the principal theaters of the continent. In Italy, especially, she created a furore. She sang there under a stage name, Yaw being too much of a mouthful for the Italians.

When at last the singer returned to her native shores and made her début at the Metropolitan in the title rôle of Lucia di Lammermoor, she received an ovation, getting nine curtain calls. It was on this occasion that she gained the distinction of having the highest range of any singer in the world, her beautifully clear notes soaring to heights that electrified the audience of blasé New Yorkers.

In 1907 the singer became the bride of Vere Goldthwaite, a novelist of Boston. Under his management she made several highly successful concert tours throughout the middle-western and southern states. But her singularly happy married life was of but short duration. Mr. Goldthwaite died and shortly after Madame Yaw received notice of the death of her friend and patron, Lady Meux.

From Lady Meux the singer inherited a considerable fortune and she decided to leave the stage and bury her sorrow among the orange groves of California. She invested her inheritance in citrous land near Covina, a little city in the heart of the orange and lemon growing districts of Southern California.

But although Madame Yaw had bidden farewell to the stage she valued the precious gift in her throat too highly to allow it to atrophy through disuse. She kept up her vocal exercises just as regularly and thoroughly as she did when she was in opera.

ELLEN BEACH YAW

It did not take long for her neighbors to discover the kindly heart and sympathetic understanding of the new resident and soon she was besieged with requests to sing for charity entertainments. The project that most intrigued her, however, was the newly established home for newsboys.

Childless, herself, her warm heart was drawn to these little homeless waifs of the street. The home had its inception in a reading and lounging room which had been rented by kind-hearted residents of Los Angeles and turned over to the newsies for their use. These boys who had hitherto had no place to congregate except street corners made full use of the new meeting place. It was noticed that a number of them spent the night there, sleeping on the floors and tables, and inquiry revealed the fact that the lads had no other place to go besides the drygoods boxes and barrels in the alleys.

When this was brought to the attention of the late General Harrison Gray Otis, publisher of the Los Angeles *Times*, he lost no time in seeking a remedy. Through his assistance a farmhouse was purchased in the suburbs of the city and converted into a home for these boys of the street.

Madame Yaw had donated her services time and time again at the concerts and entertainments that had made this home possible and in compliment to her General Otis suggested that the new home be called "Lark Ellen."

From that time on Madame Yaw has devoted the greater part of her time and talent to the maintenance of this institution. During the late war when under the pressure of patriotic duties there was danger of the home being neglected and forgotten, she practically took over its management.

The home is now under the supervision of an experienced matron who looks after these motherless boys as if they were her own. They have been trained in etiquette until their manners are much better than the average boy raised in his own home. Each youth has his regular duties to perform about the place.

These boys are allowed to remain at the home until their education is completed or until they are of age. Patrons of the home then use their influence to place them in some business or profession, the boy being given the choice under competent advice. All of the boys who have left the home are doing well and some of them have attained responsible positions in banks and business houses.

Madame Yaw has also placed several of the boys in private homes and has been the means of some of them being adopted into excellent families. She always has one of them about her own beautiful home at Lark Ellen, a suburb of Covina.

Not content to labor with her newsboy protégés, Madame Yaw has also been of invaluable assistance to promising young singers. Although she does not make a business of teaching she is always ready to lend her aid to anyone showing talent. Several of the most prominent vocalists of Southern California owe their development to her coaching. Her pupils are in as great demand for entertainments as herself.

I had the fortune to visit Madame Yaw on the day she had announced her engagement to Franklin Cannon, the well-known concert pianist of New York and Philadelphia. From daylight until midnight a flood of telegrams and telephone messages attested the great esteem and love in which this generous hearted artist is held in Southern California.

Some Peculiarities of Literary Men

BRET HARTE, when the inspiration was on him, would hire a cab for the night, and drive through the darkness without stopping until the struggle for ideas was over, and he grew calm enough to write. Nothing pleased him more than to be taken for an Englishman.

Bjornson kept his pockets full of the seeds of trees, scattering handfuls broadcast in his daily walks. He even tried to persuade his associates to do the same.

Robert Browning could not sit still. The constant shuffling of his feet wore holes in the carpet.

Zola would never accept an invitation to dinner.

Sir A. Conan Doyle, even in the coldest weather, never wears an overcoat. When he gives an afternoon lecture he removes his vest, and buttons his Prince Albert coat close to his body. He is a golf enthusiast and spends as much time as possible on the links.

F. Marion Crawford carried his own stationery, pen and ink, and never wrote with any other. He wrote every word of every novel with the same penholder.

Edmund Clarence Stedman had his favorite cat sit in a high chair at the table every day at dinner.

Ernest Renan wore his finger nails abnormally long.

Count Tolstoy went barefoot and hatless the year round. He was fond of French perfumes, and kept his linen scented with sachet powder. There was always a flower on his desk as he wrote. Although very rich, he wore the cheapest clothes he could buy.

Alexandre Dumas, the younger, bought a new painting every time he had a new book published.

Edgar Allen Poe slept with his cat. He was inordinately proud of his feet.

Disraeli wore corsets. The older he grew, the greater became his desire to dress like a young man. He had a pen stuck behind each ear when writing.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson possessed a singular power over wild birds, and could easily tame them.

Dickens was fond of wearing flashy jewelry.

Oliver Wendell Holmes used to carry a horse-chestnut in one pocket and a potato in another to ward off rheumatism. He had a great fondness for trees, and always sat under one when he could.

Hawthorne always washed his hands before reading a letter from his wife. He delighted in poring over old advertisements in the newspaper files.

Thackeray used to lift his hat whenever he passed the house in which he wrote Vanity Fair.

Sardou imagined he had a perpetual cold.

Darwin had no respect for books as books, and would cut a big volume in two, for convenience in handling, or he would tear out the leaves he required for reference.

Washington Irving never mentioned the name of his fiancée after her death, and if anybody else did so, he immediately left the room.

Victor Hugo spoke little; his remarks usually were made in the form of questions.

Keats liked red pepper on his toast.

Longfellow enjoyed walking only at sunrise or sunset, and he said his sublimest moods came upon him at these times.

Robert Louis Stevenson's favorite recreation was playing the flute, in order, as he said, to tune up his ideas.